

Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 CAC Meeting #3 Minutes (January 8, 2008)

Introduction

The third meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was held at the Whitefish Public Library conference room on Tuesday, January 8th, 2008 and began at 4:00 p.m. The CAC is an ad hoc committee for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects appointed by the Whitefish City Council. The following people attended the meeting:

CAC Attendees

Mary Jo Look	Citizen
Mary Person	Business Owner
George S. Gardner	Citizen
Don Spivey	Citizen
Nick Polumbus	Whitefish Mountain Resort
Gary Stephens	Whitefish Business Owner/Heart of Whitefish
Monte Gilman	Whitefish Chamber of Commerce
Sabine Brigetta	Citizen
Shirley Jacobsen	Whitefish City Council
Bridger Kelch	Whitefish Police Department

Agency/Consultant Team

Karin Hilding	City of Whitefish
Shane Stack	MDT Missoula District Office (Missoula)
Jeff Key	Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)
Dan Norderud	Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)

CAC members Jerry House and Dale Duff were not present.

Meeting participants were provided with a copy of the draft Transportation Plan prior to the meeting.

Meeting Purposes

The primary purpose of this meeting was to present the draft Transportation Plan document and its major components to CAC members. This was accomplished through a chapter-by-chapter discussion highlighting the analysis, findings, and recommendations in the document.

The meeting was also used to update CAC members on the current status of work for the Transportation Plan and Corridor Study and solicit general input from CAC members.

Meeting Summary

Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) began the meeting with a few remarks about the project schedule and thanked the CAC members for their patience. The original intent had been to hold this meeting in late September or early October. However, holidays and the receipt of internal review comments on an administrative draft of the document affected the schedule more than anticipated. He stated that the goal is to have the Transportation Plan completed by the end of February and a draft of the Corridor Study should follow closely after the Transportation Plan. He reiterated that significant work has been and continues to be completed for the Corridor Study.

Jeff stated that the Plan will be presented for adoption by the City Council and meetings with both the Planning Board and City Council are planned within the next 4-6 weeks.

Summary of the draft Transportation Plan

Jeff then began a chapter-by-chapter orientation and synopsis of the Transportation Plan for CAC members. Comments were encouraged at any time during the summary of the Transportation Plan. Key discussion and comments regarding individual chapters of the Transportation Plan are highlighted below.

Executive Summary

No comments received.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Background

Don Spivey commented that the City's Pedestrian and Bicyclist Trails Master Plan should be added to the list of community transportation planning documents listed on page 1-1. Don also asked about when the redesign work on the urban corridor section of US 93 in Whitefish might begin. Jeff responded that the corridor study and its recommendations must be completed and MDT must address the recommendations in a future NEPA process since this section of US 93 was addressed in the *US Highway 93 Somers-Whitefish Final EIS* (FEIS) and Record of Decision on the FEIS.

CHAPTER 2: Existing Conditions

Gary Stephens commented on Table 2-10 (2007 PM Peak LOS for Signalized Intersections) and wondered how an intersection with multiple approaches functioning at LOS C or better could result in an overall LOS of F for the intersection. Jeff indicated that the overall intersection LOS rating is not an average of the LOS on other approaches. One traffic movement, if impeded significantly enough, can adversely affect the overall LOS for an intersection.

CHAPTER 3: Travel Demand Forecasting

Jeff opened the discussion of this chapter by offering a caveat about the results of travel demand forecasting (i.e. traffic modeling). He indicated that the traffic volumes presented as the result of the modeling efforts for various scenarios should be viewed with caution. Although traffic volumes are

readily interpreted and understood, he cautioned that they are only representative of future conditions and the actual volume could vary substantially from the numbers shown. He stressed that the best indication of changes can be gained by looking at the magnitude (percent) of change in traffic volumes between year 2030 traffic volumes with and without the improvements associated with various modeling scenarios.

Considerable discussion occurred about modeling scenarios for western route alternatives (Scenarios 1-4). Jeff commented that traffic modeling allowed for a general assessment of the effects of a “bypass” on the community transportation system. He pointed out that modeling showed traffic would likely use such routes; however, the options fail to significantly reduce future traffic volumes through the core of the city. Additionally, the western route alternatives would be very costly projects with numerous environmental impacts and would likely meet substantial public opposition. For these reasons, the draft Transportation Plan does not include a recommendation for a new western route around Whitefish.

Don Spivey commented that in his opinion, a bypass is not a recognized “cure-all” for Whitefish’s traffic issues but is one more piece of the puzzle that would help remove some of the trucks and RVs to reduce distractions and dangers on the US 93 corridor in the downtown.

Mary Jo Look stated that truck traffic does not enhance the downtown and she felt that people would bypass Whitefish if there was an option.

There was a general discussion of trucks in the downtown and the portions of the truck traffic comprised of through trucks and local construction vehicles. It was pointed out that an origin-destination (O and D) study would really be needed to accurately quantify through versus local truck traffic. Jeff pointed out that such efforts can be quite costly.

Karin Hilding felt that the idea of an alternate route around Whitefish may be desirable to many residents.

Gary Stephens suggested adding language somewhere in Chapter 3 that identifies the community growth scenario considered in the traffic model.

CHAPTER 4: Projected Traffic Conditions (2030)

Jeff pointed out that Chapter 4 provides information about where problems on the local transportation network may occur in the future and focused his discussion on the information presented in Table 4-3. The V/C ratios higher than 1.0 presented in the Table 4-3 suggest areas on the transportation network that may have insufficient capacity to accommodate future traffic. He pointed out that the information in the Table will likely be used by the City of Whitefish to help establish impact fees for new developments.

CHAPTER 5: Problem Identification

Jeff highlighted the signal warrant guidelines presented in section 5.2 of the Chapter and indicated that one or more warrants must be met before the installation of a signal can be considered. There

were general discussions about a future signal installation on Spokane Avenue at JP Road and planning for new signal installations.

CHAPTER 6: School Transportation Considerations

Jeff indicated that traffic and parking related to schools notably affect community traffic flows. He pointed out that the Transportation Plan recommends that the City consider implementing a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program and indicated MDT has a funding program that may help. SRTS include actions to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure, activities to educate and encourage more students to walk or bike to school, and enforcement activities to increase safety.

CHAPTER 7: Traffic Calming

Jeff stated that Chapter 7 presents a variety of traffic calming strategies that may be applicable in some situations in Whitefish.

CHAPTER 8: Recommended Projects

Jeff highlighted the recommendations for network improvements described in the draft Transportation Plan. He advised that the recommendations include Transportation System Management (TSM) measures, major street network improvements (MSN), and Future MSN improvements. The TSM measures are relatively low-cost actions designed to address safety and operational improvements. The MSN improvements are actions that are needed to meet the anticipated traffic demands in 2030. MSN projects typically require more extensive efforts to develop and are notably more expensive than TSM projects. Jeff stressed that project cost estimates do not include right-of-way acquisition costs or costs associated with preliminary engineering, incidental construction and construction engineering. In some cases, these costs (particularly right-of-way acquisition costs) may be substantial.

Karin Hilding commented that the Whitefish-West project on US 93 may be split into several projects for construction. She felt that consideration should be given to implementing a walkway project within the Whitefish-West corridor (from Grouse Mountain to the downtown) since lots of people walk in this area and there was a recent pedestrian accident recorded along this stretch of US 93.

Shane Stack pointed out that the cost identified for the Whitefish-West is considerably higher than that shown in the draft Transportation Plan. He agreed to provide a current cost estimate for the project.

CHAPTER 9: Miscellaneous Transportation System Considerations

Jeff stated that this chapter addresses several topics including a discussion of the pros and cons of several roadway typical sections identified in the Growth Policy and transit considerations in the community. Sections 9.2 and 9.3 are intended to “plant the seed” for developing a transit partnership with Glacier National Park and for ensuring new developments are designed with future

public transit opportunities in mind. Funding has traditionally been a limiting factor for public transit services.

CHAPTER 10: Financial Analysis

Jeff commented that this chapter presents federal, state, and local funding sources for transportation related improvements. The chapter also identifies current and future funding for transportation projects that may be available to the City of Whitefish.

Gary Stephens pointed out that the Whitefish Resort Tax should be included under the Local Funding Options discussion. The resort tax was recently extended through 2023 in Whitefish.

General Comments and Discussion

Jeff concluded his summary of the draft Transportation Plan by requesting CAC members to review the document and set the end of January as a target date for receiving written comments.

Don Spivey stated that some of his written comments will likely pertain to the corridor as well as the Transportation Plan.

Mary Person commented that knowing what the situation in Whitefish will be in 2030 is difficult given our dependence on gasoline. The price of gas could be so expensive in the future that our transportation modes change significantly. Jeff pointed out that Transportation Plans need to be revisited periodically (every 5 years or so) to keep current with changing conditions within the community.

Gary Stephens stated that he would like to see the Plan include a table (like Table 2-13) that illustrated Level of Service conditions at key intersections in the community in 2030 since the data may help establish priority areas for transportation improvements. Jeff said that this information will be presented in the final version of the Plan.

Gary also indicated that Figure 2-15 shows the intersections along Wisconsin Avenue function acceptably (LOS B/C) but in reality traffic backups are common during the AM and PM peak hours due to left turning vehicles along the roadway. He felt the LOS at these intersections should be lower. Jeff responded by noting that RPA did not conduct turning movements at these intersections since recent data was available through other Traffic Impact Studies (TISs). He stated that when the counts for the TISs were conducted could influence the results of the LOS analysis, particularly if there is a notable seasonal variation in traffic.

Gary also commented that he felt it was necessary that the plan clearly depict the future transportation network and recommended adding a figure showing the future system based on functional class. It was agreed that such a figure would be added to the Plan.

Gary concluded his comments by stating that some method of prioritizing recommended projects should be done to help direct future community efforts towards implementing improvement projects. He felt that prioritizing improvements by need, effectiveness, or timeframe is essential.

Other CAC members agreed with the idea of setting priorities. Jeff responded by noting that other communities where RPA has completed plans have also asked for help setting priorities. For example, Kalispell did not want to set priorities for individual projects but rather establish priorities by group (projects with higher need versus long-term needs). Projects could then be advanced based on the availability of funding or other factors. Jeff acknowledged the benefits of setting priorities and agreed to do this for the final version of the Transportation Plan.

Mary Person pointed out that the conservation easements exist in the some areas along the route where improvements to Old Morris Trail (Project FMSN-3 in the Plan) are proposed.

Karin Hilding reiterated the need for pedestrian improvements as a short-term improvement within the Whitefish-West corridor close to the downtown.

George Gardner asked if the 7th Street Bridge would be considered a collector. Jeff indicated it would likely be associated with the city's arterial network.

The meeting concluded around 6:00 p.m.

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